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ABSTRACT

The Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) was used to assess self actualization in 266 gifted junior and senior high school students and a control group from urban and rural junior and senior high schools. Greater self actualization was noted for the gifted sample, whose POI scores most closely resembled those of college juniors and seniors. No evidence was found to support the view that gifted students feel less confident in interpersonal interactions than nongifted Ss. Results further showed that following participation in the Governor's School of South Carolina, a select summer academic program, significant but not substantial increases occurred on the majority of POI scales. (CL)

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Differences Between Gifted Adolescents and Their Peers on a Measure of Self-Actualization

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Differences Between Gifted Adolescents and Their Peers on a Measure of Self-Actualization

Self-actualization, a central concept in humanistic psychology, initially promulgated by Goldstein and extended by Rogers and Maslow, describes the motive toward realization of a person's potentials and capacities (Hall and Lindzey, 1957). A self-actualized person is said to be more fully functioning and lives a more enriched life than does the average person. Maslow (1968) stated that self-actualization is an uncommon achievement attained in late maturity. Among distinguishing characteristics of self-actualizing persons include a superior perception of reality; creativity; acceptance of self and others; spontaneity; autonomy and resistance to enculturation; democratic attitudes; better interpersonal relations and identification with humanity.

It is plausible to hypothesize that gifted and talented persons have a more self-actualizing personality orientation than their peers based on the similarity of characteristics said to exemplify both gifted and self-actualized individuals.

Shostrom's Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) has been used extensively to assess self-actualization. It consists of 150 forced-choice statements concerning values, attitudes, and behavior. Respondents are instructed to choose which of the pair of statements most consistently applies to them (Shostrom, 1974). Although some research evidence suggests direct relationships between intelligence, academic achievement, creativity and self-actualization primarily in adults (Damm, 1970; Knapp, 1976; Le May and Damm, 1968; McClain and Andrews, 1972) the extent of self-actualization in gifted adolescents requires investigation, and was therefore explored in our study.

Method

Two groups of adolescents served as subjects. One group included 266 rising junior and senior high school students (14-17 years) who attended the Governor's School of South Carolina, a select summer academic program held at the College of Charleston. Participants, chosen in proportion to enrollment from public and private schools statewide, ranked at or above the top 5% of their class, or scored equivalently on standardized ability or achievement tests. They were identified by their school selection panel as the most intellectually and creatively gifted. The POI was administered to the Governor's School sample on the first formal day of the program and six weeks later on the next to the last day of the program. The POI was administered in the spring of the following academic year to a control group composed of junior and senior classes from a public urban high school (Charleston) and a public rural high school (Lancaster). None of these classes were advanced or remedial and satisfactorily matched the gifted sample on variables of age, sex, and race (predominantly white), grade and urban-rural representation. Test instructions emphasized that individual results would remain confidential and would be used for research purposes only.

Results

A Hotelling T^2 test of POI scores of the gifted and control groups revealed a significant group difference; $F(12, 368) = 5.04$, $p < .01$. Two-sample t-tests with Bonferroni critical values indicated that the gifted sample scored significantly higher than controls on 2 of the 10 POI subscales, viz., Self-Actualizing Value, $t(379) = 2.90$, $p < .05$, and Synergy, $t(379) = 6.24$, $p < .01$. Male-female POI differences within each gifted and control group were subjected

to separate Hotelling T^2 tests. Sex differences were significant only in the gifted sample; $F(12,253) = 3.40$, $p < .01$. Females scored higher than males on the main independent scales of Time Competence, $t(264) = 3.70$, $p < .01$; Inner-Directed Support, $t(264) = 3.55$, $p < .01$; and four subscales viz., Existentiality, $t(264) = 3.20$, $p < .05$; Feeling Reactivity, $t(264) = 4.00$, $p < .01$; Acceptance of Aggression, $t(264) = 2.95$, $p < .05$, and Capacity for Intimate Contact, $t(264) = 3.48$, $p < .05$ (See Table 1).

Table 2 indicates that significant changes in the self-actualizing direction took place following participation in the Governor's School program on both of the two main independent scales, viz., Time Competence and Inner-Directed Support and on 8 of the 10 subscales of the POI.

Discussion

The greater self-actualization in the gifted sample than in the control group coupled with the observation that their POI scores most closely resembled those of college juniors and seniors (Shostrom, 1974) provide evidence to support the hypothesis of a direct relationship between, intellectual and creative ability and self-actualization. We suggest that endorsement of self-actualizing attitudes and behaviors contribute to academic success and reflect rewarding experiences associated with it.

The surprisingly better than expected showing of our control sample may, at least in part, be attributable to deliberately matching the groups on race, and inadvertently on socioeconomic status and attitude toward school. Reaves and Shearer (1973), for example, found that black college students obtained lower POI scores than white students. It is intriguing to speculate that our POI profiles might

have been considerably different had we included a substantial number of inner-city students from ghetto areas in our control group. Students dissatisfied with school and underachievers are likely to score less favorably than their peers on POI items (Le May and Damm, 1968; Williams, 1970).

One qualification of our results is that more subjects in the gifted sample may have tried to create a self-actualizing impression. Knapp (1976) concluded that a conscious attempt to look more self-actualized results in a depressed POI profile, while intellectualized responses based on overenthusiastic attempts to take the inventory in accordance with rightness from reading humanistic literature results in a hyperelevated profile. We obtained neither of these types of profiles. Further, our subjects were encouraged to respond honestly and their profiles are suggestive of those given such a response set (Warehime, Routh and Foulds, 1974; Hix and Hensley, 1978).

No evidence was found to support the view that gifted students feel less confident in their ability to interact with others as has been maintained by some (Ross and Parker, 1980; Tidwell, 1980). Females generally scored higher than males only in the gifted group probably because of the larger sample size. Since the direction and magnitudes of the sex differences accord with the majority of previous studies (Hattie, 1979; Otten, 1977; Schroeder, 1975; Shostrom, 1974; Wise and Davis, 1975) caution is advised before dismissing sex as a moderator variable in intrepreting POI scores.

These results indicate that following participation in the Governor's School, significant but not substantial increases occured on the overwhelming majority of POI scales. A tentative conclusion

would be that participation in this specialized program accounted for the increase in self-actualization. It is difficult to determine, however, which components of the program were responsible since the students were engaged in a variety of enrichment activities including: intensive academic work in a discipline in which they were competent; life-career planning sessions; as well as cultural, social, athletic, and recreational activities. Previous research, conducted with generally smaller samples selected on different criteria, has shown that growth experiences (Foulds, 1970; Knapp, 1976; Shostrom, 1974) and academic programs designed to meet social-emotional as well as intellectual needs have been followed by increases in self-actualization as assessed by the POI (Mullins and Perkins, 1973; Stanley, 1980). Further longitudinal research with appropriate control group (s) is necessary to delineate contributions of components of Governor's School type programs in facilitating self-actualization and further academic achievement.

We suggest that modification and extension of this prototypical program to less gifted and to potential college students of high risk may result in relatively greater self-actualizing changes than we obtained, with critical consequences bearing upon academic achievement, (e.g., retention), career preparation and enhanced satisfaction with college life for those students involved.

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Footnote

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TABLE 1

Personal Orientation Inventory Scores

	Gifted Students				Controls			
	Males (N=127)		Females (N=139)		Males (N=45)		Females (N=70)	
Scale	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Time Competence	15.02	3.14	16.32	2.58	14.02	2.91	15.44	3.03
Inner-Directed Support	79.47	10.09	83.78	9.66	78.87	9.42	83.43	9.61
Self-Actualizing Value	20.02	2.80	20.78	2.46	19.07	3.18	19.89	2.21
Existentiality	18.39	3.69	19.88	3.90	17.71	3.81	19.21	4.19
Feeling Reactivity	14.86	3.02	16.27	2.72	15.75	2.93	16.21	2.87
Spontaneity	11.51	2.67	12.24	2.42	11.47	2.30	12.40	2.15
Self-Regard	11.80	2.24	11.78	2.26	11.58	2.47	12.26	2.16
Self-Acceptance	14.22	3.21	14.58	2.97	13.29	2.74	15.07	3.49
Nature of Man	11.65	1.79	11.83	1.84	10.98	2.16	11.67	1.74
Synergy	6.93	1.32	7.24	1.14	6.22	1.40	6.23	1.18
Acceptance of Aggression	15.82	3.22	16.92	2.87	15.60	3.17	16.36	2.75
Capacity for Intimate Contact	16.33	3.37	17.73	3.21	16.40	4.06	17.77	3.29

TABLE 2

Pretest and Posttest POI Scores for Governor's School Participants

	Pretest		Posttest		
Scale	M	SD	M	SD	t
Time Competence	15.67	2.89	16.04	3.18	1.99*
Inner-Directed Support	81.91	10.50	85.72	12.11	6.05***
Self-Actualizing Value	20.72	4.38	21.01	2.86	.99
Existentiality	19.16	4.11	20.39	4.56	4.93***
Feeling Reactivity	15.61	2.94	16.24	3.33	3.32***
Spontaneity	11.93	2.63	12.69	2.88	4.66***
Self-Regard	11.82	2.30	12.30	2.70	2.98**
Self-Acceptance	14.35	3.23	15.24	3.76	4.52***
Nature of Man	11.80	1.78	11.93	2.00	.91
Synergy	7.10	1.25	7.38	1.34	2.76**
Acceptance of Aggression	16.46	3.20	16.92	3.26	2.32*
Capacity for Intimate Contact	17.04	3.44	17.84	3.82	3.83***

N = 228

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

***$p < .001$